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Helping Students Express Stance:

**What Research Reveals about Stance
Qualities in Successful Student Writing in
the Disciplines**

**Zak Lancaster
Wake Forest University, NC
Student Success in Writing Conference
Savannah, GA. April 6, 2018**



Outline

1. Approaching *stance*

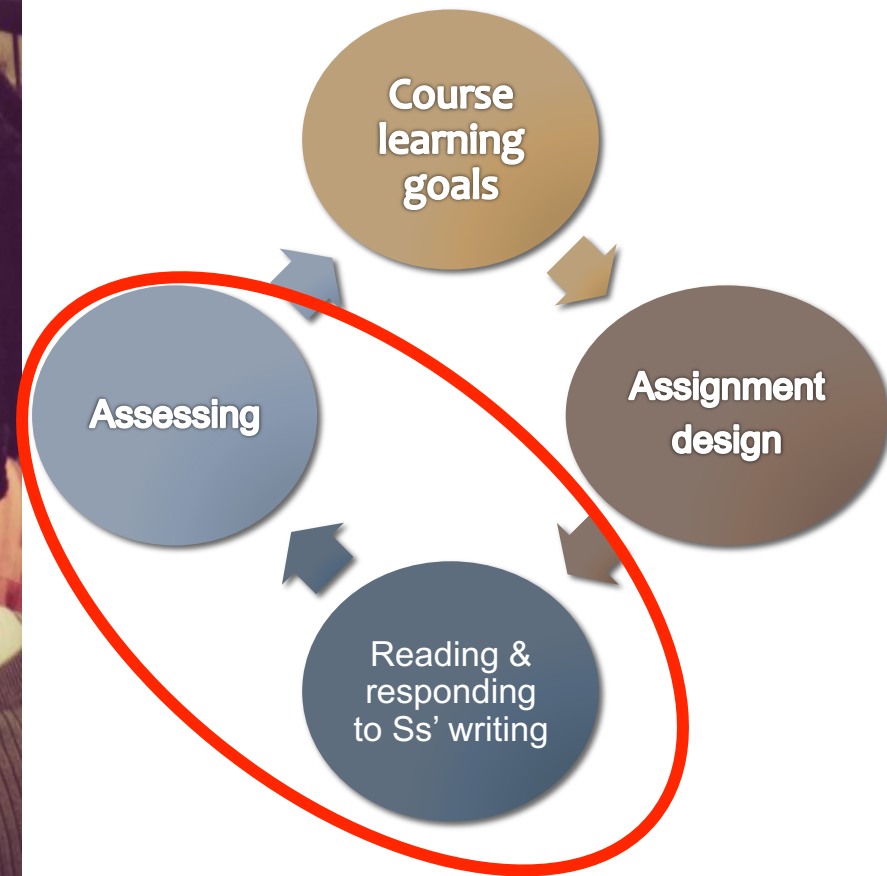
2. Studies of:

- Beginning v. advanced writers
- High- v. lower-performers
- Awareness v. performance
- Training instructors

3. Helping students express stance



Writing Associates Seminar (WAC/WID)



Stance and judgment

“To judge whether a student fulfills motive, teachers respond to the writer’s presence in a text; the quality of this presence helps them decide whether a student has learned something in the course.”

Mary Soliday, *Everyday Genres* (2011, 36)

For example

“To treat evidence properly, writers learn the distance they should maintain from readers and the typical words they should use to talk about evidence.”

Mary Soliday, *Everyday Genres* (2011, 36)

Talking about evidence in Econ

- a. “Using an ex post analysis of share prices and product prices, I was able to show that the Supreme Court decision had negligible effects on the industry, and therefore a better outcome could have been achieved.”
- b. “Using my personal opinion to analyze the remedies used in this case, I determined the District Court was correct in allowing the merger to proceed.”

Stance =

“... *The ways writers present themselves and convey their judgments, opinions, and commitments. It is the ways that writers intrude to stamp their personal authority onto their arguments or step back and disguise their involvement.*”

Ken Hyland (2005, p. 176)

Linguistic patterns of *stance* and ...

- **Disciplinary variation** (MacDonald, 1994; Hyland, 2005)
- **Reader judgments** (Feak, 2008; Soliday, 2004; 2011)
- **Paper grades/scores** (Barton, 1993; Lancaster, 2012; 2014; North, 2005; Wu, 2007; Miller, Mitchell & Pessoa, 2014; Swain, 2009)
- **Developmental level** (Aull & Lancaster, 2014; Coffin, 2002; Derewianka, 2009)
- **English L1/L2 differences** (Hyland & Milton, 1997; Schleppegrell, 2004)

Dimensions of stance

Dimension	Descriptor
Epistemic	--> Stance toward evidence <i>⇒ It is clear that; the evidence shows; it would seem that</i>
Attitudinal	--> Stance toward ideas <i>⇒ important, significant, useful, appropriate</i>
Interactional	--> Stance toward readers and others' voices

Halliday & Matthiessen 2004;
Martin & Rose, 2007;
Martin & White, 2005

Attitudinal Stance

1. Young's account of oppression **provides a useful analysis** in the case of the film "the Battle of Algiers," demonstrating ... (PolTh)
2. Based on these reasons, the rule of reason approach seems most **appropriate and justified**. (Econ)
3. We must, however, admit that the argument Socrates gave to differentiate the two was **faulty**, given his apparent confusion and self-interest, which might have caused him to **make a poor argument** out of haste even if he intended to do the just thing. (Phil)

Epistemic Stance

1. **It would appear**, then, that Foucault's formulation of politics and ethics leaves one in the uncomfortable position of ... (PolTh)
2. **This model shows** that the difference in market share between the firms in an oligopoly is irrelevant, ... (Econ)
3. Since the argument hinges on these three ideas, and Socrates **could** be wrong about each of them, **I think it is safe to conclude** that he did fail to distinguish pleasure and the good. (Phil)

Interactional Stance

1. In the case of the prison system, **it is not** that ethics and politics were ever incompatible, **but rather** that ethics were not important when making political decisions. (PolTh)
2. **While that may be true**, the circumstances pertaining to this case show clearly that, economically, it makes sense to allow the horizontal price-fixing, except with lower prices. (Econ)
3. “But,” **one might object**, “we actually can ...” / **I agree** with this objection **to an extent**. (Phil)

Beginning v. Advanced College Writers

First-year student (essay)

As technology continues to develop, **there is absolutely no doubt** that social media will become a resource for people to collaborate on ideas and organize protests. However, **it will never cause** a revolution because ...

Fourth-year Bio major (MICUSP)

It is difficult to conclude from these two studies if the mating system of Sarasota dolphins is polygynous, promiscuous, or **possibly something else**. Evidence is supported for both a polygynous and a promiscuous mating system. **It might be possible that** two alternative strategies exist in this population, such as in the eastern Pacific spinner dolphins. Alternatively, ...

Fourth-Year Econ Major

However, this case is **not without** concerns. There is the **possibility** for abuse **if** the producer sets different maximum prices for different retailers, allowing some to reap higher profits. There is also a **possibility** that for new retailers to enter the market they would have to charge higher prices initially, in which case a maximum price **could** deter competition.

It **appears**, then, that maximum price fixing does the greatest harm when set below a competitive level. In Case 4 it **could** **potentially** do harm to small retailers trying to enter the market, but does so for the benefit of consumers and the producer. **Based purely on the models**, it **appears** that, at the very least, maximum prices deserve a Rule of Reason approach to evaluate their cost and benefits.

Aull & Lancaster (2014)

Table 4. Approximative Hedges: Frequencies per 100,000 Words.

	WFU-FY	UM-FY	FY total	UP	COCAA
Number of word tokens	925,535	2,592,842	3,518,377	1315679	91066191
Items searched	Normalized frequencies per 100,000 words				
apparent(ly)	7.5	8.0	7.8	17.6	12.0
approximately	2.1	3.2	2.9	3.0	11.3
essentially	6.9	8.5	8.1	15.7	5.4
evidently	6.9	1.8	3.1	0.4	1.0
generally	4.9	4.0	4.2	11.1	18.1
in general	2.1	2.4	2.3	6.5	8.9
in many cases	2.1	1.4	1.6	0.5	1.4
in many ways	2.5	1.0	1.4	2.2	1.4
in most cases	1.2	2.0	1.8	0.5	1.1
primarily	5.2	2.6	3.3	11.7	11.0
largely	6.1	2.5	3.5	11.8	11.1
mostly	4.8	2.4	3.0	4.4	5.7
often	42.4	31.8	34.6	50.5	57.6
relatively	6.5	6.6	6.6	5.6	15.2
roughly	1.0	1.8	1.6	2.5	3.5
somewhat	4.0	4.7	4.5	11.7	7.5
usually	11.5	8.5	9.3	8.5	15.6
sometimes	6.8	10.9	9.8	9.0	15.9
Total	124.0	104.2	109.5	173.5	203.8

Aull & Lancaster (2014)

Table 3. Boosters Frequencies per 100,000 Words.

	WFU-FY	UM-FY	FY total	UP	COCAA
Number of word tokens	925,535	2,592,842	3,518,377	1,315,679	91,066,191
Normalized frequencies per 100,000 words					
<i>very</i>	86.1	129.5	118.1	73.0	58.4
<i>highly</i>	16.0	31.4	27.3	12.8	16.0
<i>strongly</i>	11.7	6.7	8.0	8.3	7.9
<i>much</i>	105.8	142.8	133.1	72.7	63.1
<i>a lot</i>	15.5	30.0	26.2	4.7	6.7
<i>totally</i>	1.2	2.2	1.9	2.1	2.4
<i>definitely</i>	7.6	9.2	8.8	3.3	1.3
<i>clearly</i>	14.5	18.0	17.1	26.7	16.9
<i>certainly</i>	25.6	13.7	16.8	16.3	10.3
<i>undoubtedly</i>	5.9	4.9	5.2	2.4	2.0
<i>without a doubt/doubtless</i>	2.1	1.3	1.5	1.1	0.5
<i>extremely</i>	17.8	22.1	21.0	7.8	6.1
<i>really</i>	36.3	41.9	40.4	18.5	2.5
<i>truly</i>	35.4	43.0	41.0	20.6	4.9
<i>obvious</i>	7.3	09.4	8.9	9.7	6.7
<i>obviously</i>	6.5	9.0	8.3	5.7	4.0
<i>no doubt</i>	5.2	2.8	3.4	2.4	2.6
Total	400.4	518.0	487.1	288.1	222.1

But when to hedge? When to boost?

Countless subsequent antitrust cases have **completely** ignored the reasoning set forth by the Court.

It would seem, then, the Von's decision was a failure. This statement leads to a natural question: **if** the Court got it wrong in Von's, **what might** the correct decision have been?

For several reasons, the Supreme Court **might** have

...

(Luis, HG1, S54-59)

But when to hedge? When to boost?

review of evidence

As **demonstrated** in a recent survey of physician satisfaction by Harvard Medical School, physician autonomy and the ability to provide high-quality care, **not** income, are **strongly** associated with changes in job satisfaction.²⁹

Evaluation

Thus, it **seems reasonable to assume** that health care providers would take advantage of the greater bargaining power to improve the quality of care.

Recommendation

Such measures **might** take the form of measures included in many state patient protection bills

(Ken, HG3, S78-80)

When to hedge in Political Theory?

... While this method is **perhaps** more decisive in eliminating the injustice, it does **at least appear** to have the drawback of not being in the immediate interests of any group, as they would stand to lose their identities. Therefore, while **Fraser's** matrix **may** help soften the redistributive-recognition dilemma, it doesn't offer any **obvious** solutions to the problem of recognition in modern society.

As a normative theorist, **Rawls'** approach differs greatly from Fraser's. ...

(Ethan, HG3, S74-77)

When to hedge in History?

In sum, Anderson's approach reflects an **apparent** trend in the historiography of the French and Indian War. **It appears** that scholars publishing books on the war in the mid-2000s, notably William Fowler Jr. and Alfred Cave, follow similar progressions and develop similar arguments; they **appear**, that is, to abide by the premise that the dynamic of power in North America cannot be simplified to the two European powers. A **fair** interpretation of this **apparent** convergence of interpretations **may** be attributed to ...

(Jamie, HG11, S45-48)

High- v. Lower-performing writers

- Economics
- Political theory
- Philosophy

A “novice academic” stance

1. Contrastiveness
2. Critical distance
3. Discoursal alignment

1. Contrastiveness

Foregrounding of problems and disagreements

e.g.,

- Indicating gaps, shortcomings, limitations, contradictions
- Negotiating claims with a skeptical reader:
e.g., *While; It is true; I do not deny.*

But ...

“As a profession, we may wish to ask ourselves why we seem to be rewarding our student writers primarily for reproducing our own contrastive and competitive epistemological stance.”

- Barton, 1993, p. 766

2. Critical distance

Detachment from the entities under analysis and or from the object of critiques.

e.g.,

- Concept-focused
- Cautious in judgments
- Distant in critiques

3. Discoursal alignment

Students' implicit or explicit attempts to identify themselves as novice members of a community

e.g.,

- Framing evaluations in terms of disciplinary constructs
- Showing appreciation of concepts from class readings and discussions

Examples of discorsal alignment

- The realities raised by Fraser offer important complexities to Young's political discourse. Young provides a useful schematic for understanding oppression both in Coetzee's *Disgrace* and contemporary society (PolTh, Elisa, HG1, S138-140)
- Using an ex post analysis of share prices and product prices, I was able to show that the Supreme Court decision had negligible effects on the industry, and therefore a better outcome could have been achieved. (Econ, Keith, HG4, S90-92)

Examples of discorsal alignment

1. Foucault's operational definition of ethics ***provides*** a description of what society does. (Emma, HG5, S115)
2. Gramsci's ideal of the "public spirit" ***supplies the viewpoint*** to Weber's suggestion of a political calling. (Kurt, HG6, S26)
3. Rawls's concept of justice as fairness ***provides a solution*** to the social and economic injustice that Fanon and his race suffer. (Sarah, HG8, S29)
4. George Orwell's essays ***reveal*** how people outside the political establishment ... (Richard, HG9, S9)

Professor's remarks

“Elisa’s essay is very sympathetic to this very cool typology, which is a very valuable analytic tool for understanding issues like oppression [...] So it’s all sympathetic. It’s critical without saying, “Therefore, Iris Young is full of s***. She doesn’t know what she’s talking about.”

Awareness v.
performance

Richard

Richard's explicit awareness of stance

RICHARD: In philosophy papers generally, I tend to express my stance in a blunt and assertive way. But in more literary disciplines like English and Classics, I think I'm more measured or reserved.

Frequencies of hedging

Corpus	Hedges
Philosophy essays (MICUSP) (n=20)	12.2
Philosophy essays (Richard) (n=12)	12.7
English essays (MICUSP) (n=65)	5.0
English essays (Richard) (n=5)	3.4

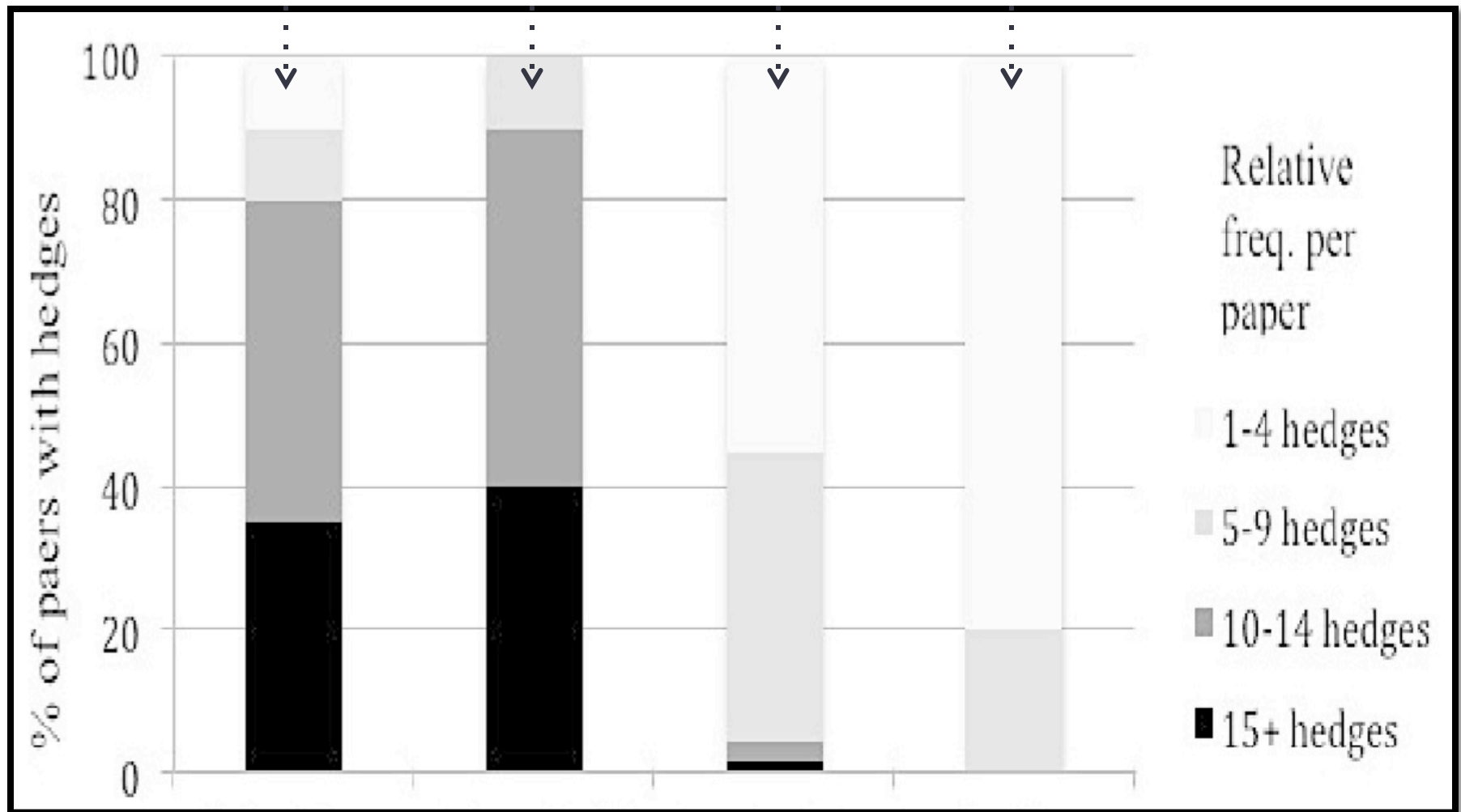
Proportion of Papers

Philosophy
(MICUSP)

Philosophy
(Richard)

English
(MICUSP)

English
(Richard)



4 functions of hedging

1. Offering polite rejoinders

⇒ “However, this objection does not **seem** successful.”

2. Limiting scope

⇒ “Expediency and correspondence are, **at least in many cases**, quite closely united.”

3. “Evidentializing”

⇒ “Second, it **seems** that Burnyeat’s interpretation of the text of De Anima is quite odd.”

4. Projecting humility when guiding the reader

⇒ “**I hope to show** that ... eliminativist materialism *might* be found plausible again.”

Maria (Richard's professor)

Valued elements in philosophy writing?

MARIA: “concise,” “direct,” “assertive,” and “straightforward.”

⇒ “I mean, really, it’s direct, like ‘bang, here’s my point’. No frills, not too much contextualizing. In my own writing, I’m willing to come off as blunt or even rude to get my point across.”

What do faculty (say they) value?

Be critical: take a position and offer judgments

... but don't be biased or judgmental

Show commitment and passion for your argument

... but be objective ... don't emote too much

... and try not to use "I" so much

Use your own words, your own voice

... but don't be colloquial or too personal

Write assertively and with authority

... but don't forget you're a student, not an expert

What does my teacher want?



Training in Discourse Analysis



“Bringing the darkness to light.”

- Genre constraints
- Social motives
- Valued stances and voices

Summer Homework: Discourse Analysis

“Examine passages where the writers are:

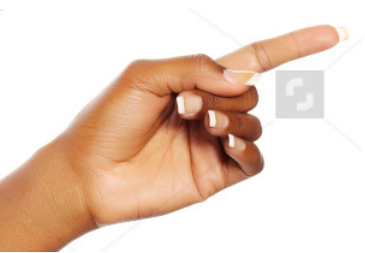
1. Making their presence known or else hiding overt presence
2. Taking a stance toward the evidence they're using.
3. Taking a stance toward the anticipated reader.
4. Expressing affect or attitude, toward their own or others' views.

⇒ What differences in stance qualities, if any, did you identify in the two papers?

⇒ How can you explain these differences in light of (a) your assignment goals and (b) disciplinary conventions?”

E.J. – psychology research report

“.. See here, he’s moving from firm knowledge to hypothesis. This is pretty clear. I can show this kind of move.”



Lower life satisfaction **has been shown** to be associated with materialism (Tsang, Carpenter, Roberts, Frisch & Carlisle, 2014), depressive symptoms (Howard, Galambos, & Krahn, 2014), undesired increase in solitary activities (Coccia & Darling, 2014), and greater perceived stress (Trzcieniecka-Green et al., 2012). Given these outcomes, life satisfaction is **clearly** a desirable quality in regards to emotional well-being. Therefore, as with self-esteem, testing whether religiosity is a predictor of life satisfaction **could reveal** associations between religiosity and these positive outcomes.

Instructors' stated gains

- “I think talking about stance in general could be useful. What kind of stance do I want them to take?” (Michaelle, PolSci)
- “I’m not going to ban ‘/’ any more (in history book reviews).” (Jake, HIS)
- “I often talk to my students about leveraging sources to their use, and now I think I can show them a little better what that looks like” (E.J. – Psych)
- “Many seem to come away thinking of philosophy as kind of hostile, and I think these [*pointing to hedges*] can help dissuade them from that view.” (Maria – Philosophy)

Challenges for teaching

1. Extending consciousness-raising requires a shift in beliefs about language and relationship to meaning-making.
2. How to adopt a descriptive/functional view of language while assisting students' writing development.
3. How to draw attention to language *use*—and *patterns* of language use—in the context of students' ongoing meaning-making.

6 teaching tips

1. Discuss with students what sorts of stances are valued in the field and/or genre and/or task
2. Identify desired stance in assignment prompts
3. Point out effective stances in reading material
4. Have students “play” with stances, e.g., rewriting passages
5. Give students opportunities to reflect on their own stance-taking
6. Discuss with students the differences between stance and voice

Stance and Voice

Voice: community / reader-oriented

- “The authorized ways of speaking as a community member.”



Stance: writer-oriented:
authorial presence, expression of attitude
and epistemic commitments

Thank You!

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